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INFO GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
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CHUSMTM RIYADH SA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000828

PARIS FOR O'FRIEL, LONDON FOR GOLDRICH, RIYADH PLEASE PASS
TO DHAHRAN

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SUBJECT: TWO SAUDI PROFESSIONALS: BET ON THE PEOPLE, NOT
THE REGIME

REF: RIYADH 1685

CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING CONSUL GENERAL CHARLES RICHE FOR REASONS 1.5 (B)
AND (D).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶1. (C) ON APRIL 2, POLOFF MET WITH A LOCAL SAUDI LAWYER, DR. BASIM ALIM (STRICTLY PROTECT), TO DISCUSS HIS OPEN LETTER TO CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH CALLING FOR REFORM. A "SELF-MADE" LAWYER, ALIM WAS CHOSEN IN DECEMBER 2002 TO REPRESENT SEVERAL SAUDI CHARITIES IN THE SEPTEMBER 11 LAWSUIT AND ADMITS THAT HE IS LABELED AN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST BY MANY. ALIM SAID THAT THE U.S. IS BACKING THE WRONG HORSE (REFERRING TO THE AL SAUD), AND THAT AMERICA SHOULD BE SUPPORTING THE PEOPLE. DURING THE MEETING, ALIM AND AN ASSOCIATE OF HIS DESCRIBED SAUDI SOCIETY AS "AT A BOILING POINT" WARNING THAT "THE TABLES WILL TURN, AND WHEN THEY DO, IT WILL HAPPEN QUICKLY, AND THE U.S. WILL BE ON THE WRONG SIDE." ALIM SAID THAT THERE ARE PRESENTLY TWO VERY DANGEROUS TRENDS IN THE COUNTRY; 1) SAUDIS ARE SKEPTICAL AND QUESTIONING THE MOTIVES AND STATEMENTS OF THEIR GOVERNMENT, AND 2) THAT PEOPLE HAVE BECOME AMBIVALENT TO WHETHER THE AL SAUD STAYS OR GOES. ALIM CONTENDS THAT PRESSURE FROM THE OUTSIDE IS STARTING TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE AL SAUD, CITING THE RELEASE OF LEADING POLITICAL DISSIDENT SHAYKH SAEED BIN ZA'ER AS AN EXAMPLE (SEE REFTTEL). THE TWO MEN ARGUE THAT IT IS NOT TOO LATE FOR THE U.S. TO TURN THE TIDE OF ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT IF THE U.S. BETS ON THE PEOPLE.

¶2. (C) WHILE THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE TWO MEN ARE NOT ENTIRELY NEW, THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF HOW OUT OF TOUCH THE AL SAUD ARE WITH THEIR PEOPLE AND HOW THE U.S. CAN WIN BACK THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE ARABS ARE WORTH NOTING. MORE THAN ANYTHING, HOWEVER, THE MEETING HIGHLIGHTED THE DICHOTOMY THAT ARISES WHEN DISCUSSING REFORM WITH HEJAZIS. WHILE SOME ARGUE THAT THE U.S. IS INTERFERING TOO MUCH WITH THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT BY PRESSURING THEM TO REFORM, OTHERS ARGUE FOR GREATER INTERFERENCE, AND STILL OTHERS SOMEHOW ARGUE FOR BOTH. WE GET ONLY SLIPPERY ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT THE "GRASSROOTS" WANTS, IS WILLING TO ACCEPT, AND WHO CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

BET ON THE PEOPLE, LOOSEN YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE AL SAUD

¶3. (C) ON APRIL 2, POLOFF MET WITH DR. BASIM ALIM (STRICTLY PROTECT), A "SELF-MADE LAWYER," TO DISCUSS HIS RECENTLY PUBLISHED LETTER ADDRESSED TO CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH CALLING FOR REFORM. (NOTE: IN DECEMBER, 2002, ALIM WAS CHOSEN TO REPRESENT SEVERAL SAUDI CHARITIES IN THE SEPTEMBER 11 LAWSUIT

AND ADMITS THAT MANY PEOPLE LABEL HIM AS AN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST. END NOTE.) THE MEETING WAS ALSO ATTENDED BY DR. WALED FATEIHI (STRICTLY PROTECT), A U.S. EDUCATED PHYSICIAN AND CLOSE FRIEND OF ALIM. ALIM, WHILE OPEN TO DISCUSSING HIS ARTICLE, TOOK MORE INTEREST IN CONVEYING THE MESSAGE THAT THE USG NEEDS TO HALT ITS SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENTS THAT GO AGAINST THE PRINCIPLES OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION. HE BELIEVES THAT THE U.S. IS ACTING AS AN ENABLER TO THESE DESPOTIC REGIMES IN THE REGION, WHICH ULTIMATELY BREEDS RESENTMENT FROM THE PEOPLE. HE CONTENTS THAT THE AL SAUD HAVE BECOME TOO DEPENDENT ON THE U.S. AND AS A RESULT DON'T ALWAYS HAVE THE PEOPLES' BEST INTEREST AT HEART. LIKE MANY, ALIM DOES NOT MIND A LIMITED MONARCHY, STATING "THEY CAN HAVE THEIR KING, AND APPOINT A FEW PRINCES, BUT THAT'S IT. THE POWER NEEDS TO BE GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE."

14. (C) ALIM CONTENTS THAT PRESSURE FROM THE OUTSIDE IS STARTING TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE AL SAUD, CITING THE RELEASE OF LEADING POLITICAL DISSIDENT SHAYKH SAEED BIN ZA'ER AS AN EXAMPLE (SEE REFTTEL). ACCORDING TO ALIM, MIRA, (THE SAUDI OPPOSITION GROUP IN LONDON), THREATENED TO FILE A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE AL SAUD IN BELGIUM (NFI), AND WHEN THE AL SAUD FOUND OUT ABOUT IT, THEY RELEASED AL ZA'ER. ALIM BELIEVES THAT REFORM PETITIONS AND LETTERS LIKE HIS WOULD CARRY GREATER WEIGHT IF THERE WAS MORE PRESSURE ON THE AL SAUD. HE EVEN WENT AS FAR AS TO SUGGEST THAT THE U.S. CONSIDER PLACING SANCTIONS ON THE KINGDOM.

15. (C) ALIM AND FATEIHI BELIEVE THAT IN ANY SOCIETY, FIVE PERCENT OF POPULATION, "THE INTELLIGENTSIA", FORCE THE SYSTEM ARGUE THAT THEY CAN DO IT BUT THEY NEED THE U.S. TO "SUPPORT THE PEOPLE, AND TO BET ON THE PEOPLE. WE HAVE OUR OWN BEN FRANKLINS AND JOHN HANCOCKS, BUT YOU NEED TO GIVE US A CHANCE." FATEIHI URGED A REGIONAL CHANGE STATING THAT "IF THE U.S. DOES NOT LOOK TO FORCE OTHER REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO CHANGE LIKE THE U.S. IS DOING IN IRAQ, IT WILL HAVE ALL BEEN FOR NOTHING."

16. (C) BOTH MEN, WHO HAVE SPENT DECADES IN THE STATES AS STUDENTS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS, ARE SADDENED BY THE ANTI-U.S. SENTIMENT THAT HAS ONLY GROWN OVER THE YEARS IN THE ARAB AND MUSLIM WORLD. "I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD GET TO THIS. BUT IT IS NOT TOO LATE. ARABS ARE VERY EMOTIONAL PEOPLE, AND IF YOU TAKE A STAND AGAINST THESE DESPOTIC GOVERNMENTS, THE PEOPLE WILL BE WITH YOU." POLOFF, CITING THE INTERNAL RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL STRIFE IN THE COUNTRY, ASKED IF THEY FELT CONFIDENT THAT THEY KNEW WHAT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL WANTED, AND WOULD THEY BE ABLE TO GET "THE REST TO FOLLOW." WITHOUT PROVIDING DETAILS, THEY SAID THAT THEY KNEW WHAT THE GRASSROOTS WANTED AND KNEW WHAT THE ALLOWABLE PARAMETERS OF CHANGE WERE IN THE KINGDOM.

EQUALITY AND DIGNITY. . . ALL ELEMENTS OF THE CONSTITUTION

17. (C) RECALLING THEIR ADMIRATION FOR THE U.S. CONSTITUTION, ALIM AND FATEIHI ARGUED THAT WHAT SAUDIS REALLY WANT IS EQUALITY. THEY WANT TO BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO SUCCEED AND WANT THEIR DIGNITY BACK. ALIM SAID THAT "THE AL SAUD HAVE SQUEEZED OUT THE LITTLE PEOPLE AND HAVE THEIR TENTACLES IN EVERYTHING. UNDER EVERY STONE IS A PRINCE, AND THEY ARE OUT OF TOUCH WITH THEIR PEOPLE." ALIM SAID THAT THERE ARE PRESENTLY TWO VERY DANGEROUS TRENDS IN THE COUNTRY; 1) SAUDIS ARE SKEPTICAL AND QUESTIONING THE MOTIVES AND STATEMENTS OF THEIR GOVERNMENT, AND 2) THAT PEOPLE HAVE BECOME AMBIVALENT TO WHETHER THE AL SAUD STAYS OR GOES.

18. (C) ALIM CRITICIZED A RECENT STATEMENT GIVEN BY PRINCE SULTAN WHOM HE REPORTED AS SAYING, "EVEN SOMEONE FROM JIZAN CAN COME SEE ME." ALIM FOUND THIS STATEMENT TO BE HIGHLY INSULTING, PARTICULARLY TO THE JIZANIS, BECAUSE IT INSINUATED THAT THEY ARE THE LOWEST OF THE LOW IN THE KINGDOM BUT STILL CAN CONSIDER THEMSELVES PRIVILEGED ENOUGH TO MEET A POWERFUL PRINCE. THEY WERE ALSO CRITICAL OF SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD AL-FAISAL DURING A RECENT PRESS BRIEFING. APPARENTLY, A FEMALE SAUDI JOURNALIST ASKED THE FOREIGN MINISTER IF HE HAD SEEN THE DEPARTMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT. ACCORDING TO THE TWO MEN, HE COMPLETELY DISMISSED HER AND JUST REPLIED QUITE TERSELY, "NO." THEY RESENT THAT SAUD AL-FAISAL WOULD BE SO

SHORT WITH A SAUDI CITIZEN, AND INTERPRET IT AS AN INSINUATION FROM THE FM THAT SAUDIS SHOULD NOT BE CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE QUESTION HAD COME FROM A WESTERN REPORTER, SAUD AL-FAISAL'S RESPONSE WOULD HAVE BEEN HANDLED MUCH DIFFERENTLY, ACCORDING TO FATEIHI. (COMMENT: POLOFF HAS RECENTLY HEARD CRITICISM REGARDING SAUD AL-FAISAL'S PRESS CONFERENCES. LOCAL JOURNALISTS PERCEIVE THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER INCREASINGLY CATERS TO THE FOREIGN MEDIA AND TELLS THEM THAT THE SAG IS INTERESTED IN REFORM AND HUMAN RIGHTS, BUT DOES NOT TAKE THE SAME INTEREST IN DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES WITH LOCAL REPORTERS, AND SOMETIMES DELIVERS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT MESSAGE ALL TOGETHER. END COMMENT.)

ALIM'S IDEAS FOR REFORM

¶9. (U) HERE ARE VERBATIM EXCERPTS OF DR. ALIM'S LETTER TO THE CROWN PRINCE THAT APPEARED IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY, ARAB NEWS ON MARCH 23, 2003. (NOTE: THE ARTICLE ORIGINALLY RAN IN THE ARABIC DAILY, AL MADINA. END NOTE.)

BEGIN TEXT

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS,
AN UNJUST WAR HAS BEGUN AND THE KINGDOM MUST MOVE FROM A STATE OF INACTION TO ONE OF POSITIVE CONFRONTATION AGAINST ANY AGGRESSOR WHO VIOLATES THE SOVEREIGNTY AND SANCTITY OF COUNTRIES AND MURDERS OUR BRETHREN WHEREVER THEY ARE. ON THE INTERNAL FRONT, WE HOPE TO SEE EACH INDIVIDUAL FASHIONED TO BECOME PART AND PARCEL OF HIS NATION, AWARE OF HIS SERVED BY HAILING AND PRAISING BUT FOUND IN THE HEARTS OF THE FAITHFUL AND THE SINCERE WORKING TO DELIVER THEIR COUNTRY AND NATION FROM ALL THREATS. YOUR HIGHNESS, EVERY CITIZEN IS WILLING TO OFFER ALL THEY POSSESS, INCLUDING THEIR LIVES, IF THE CONVICTION IS CREATED INSIDE THEM THAT SINCERITY PREVAILS FROM TOP TO BOTTOM. EVERY INDIVIDUAL MUST SENSE THIS EQUALITY AS REALITY, WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION AND FAVORITISM FOR ANYONE, NO MATTER WHO THEY MIGHT BE. IT IS TIME TO ENERGIZE AND ACTIVATE OUR CIVIL INSTITUTIONS SO THEY MAY PLAY A MORE SUPPORTIVE ROLE IN SERVING THE NATION'S INTERESTS AND STIMULATING LEADERSHIP POLICIES. THE CALL FOR INCORPORATING FREEDOM OF CHOICE, ACCOUNTABILITY, FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, INTELLECTUAL PLURALISM AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE, ALL THIS COMES WITHIN OUR RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS.

¶10. (U) YOUR HIGHNESS, OUR YOUTH NEED TO BE DIRECTED BY PLANTING IN THEM THE NOBLE CHARACTERS THAT THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD PEACE BE UPON HIM, SET FOR THE NATION'S YOUTH. THIS CAN BE DONE NOT ONLY THROUGH MILITARY SERVICE BUT THROUGH ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY SERVICE. I APPEAL TO YOUR HIGHNESS TO OPEN THE WAY FOR AN EXTENSIVE POPULAR EFFORT ON ALL FRONTS IN SUPPORT OF OUR NATION SO THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO REPULSE THE RISKS DESCENDING ON IT FROM ALL SIDES. WE HOPE YOU WILL REWARD THE HAND THAT IS BEING STRETCHED OUT IN UNITY SO THAT WE CAN STAND TOGETHER IN THE FACE OF DANGER. END TEXT.

¶11. (U) BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION. ALIM IS MARRIED AND HAS CHILDREN. HE RECEIVED HIS LAW DEGREE FROM HARVARD AND HIS PH.D. FROM AMERICAN UNIVERSITY. HE IS VERY PROUD OF THE FACT THAT HE STARTED HIS OWN LAW PRACTICE AND HAS HIS FIRST CHECK FRAMED ON THE WALL IN HIS OFFICE.

RICHE